

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2024, MOUNT EPHRAIM COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
MEETING HELD IN BOROUGH HALL MEETING ROOM**

MEETING CALL TO ORDER/OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS STATEMENT

Mayor Carney called the meeting to order at 7:07pm with the “Pledge of Allegiance”. She announced that this meeting was posted in accordance with the “Open Public Meetings Act” and proper notice of this meeting was made.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll with Mayor Carney, Commissioner Marrone and Commissioner Wolk all present. Also in attendance for the Borough were Clerk Shannon, Solicitor Stuart Platt and Engineer Greg Fusco.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Carney announced that the March 6, 2024, commission meeting minutes and the March 15, 2024, special meeting minutes were submitted for review and approval. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the minutes were approved with all in favor.

APPROVAL OF VOUCHERS

Mayor Carney announced that vouchers in the amount of \$2,120,801.19 were submitted for approval. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the vouchers as submitted were approved with the following poll vote: Carney-yes; Marrone-yes, Wolk-yes

ORDINANCES FOR PUBLIC HEARING AND ADOPTION

The Clerk read the following ordinance by title:

Ord. 2024-03 Ordinance to Exceed the Municipal Budget Appropriation Limits and to Establish a CAP Bank (N.J.S.A. 40A:4-45.14) for Calendar Year 2024

Mayor Carney opened the public hearing on this ordinance. Present were Terri Armbruster and Stan Witkowski who asked what the ordinance was about. Auditor Rob Inverso explained this ordinance allows municipalities to increase appropriations by 3.5% rather than 2.5% but if you don’t need the additional percentage point, you can bank it for use in future years. Mayor Carney explained this is a standard ordinance done by every town in case we need additional funds for an emergency. Teresa Malik asked if you are asking for money that you don’t even know you need but it will come from us. Solicitor Platt explained there are two caps—one is a spending cap and one is a levy cap. Every municipality can increase appropriations by 2.5% but this allows us to go to 3.5% for a rainy-day fund. This just protects us in case something unforeseen happens.

Seeing no further public comment, on a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the hearing was closed. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, Ordinance 2024-03 was adopted with the following poll vote: Carney-yes; Marrone-yes; Wolk-yes.

Clerk Shannon then read the following ordinances for public hearing and adoption:

Ord. 2024-04 Repealing and Replacing Ordinance 2023-14, Amending the Code of the Borough of Mount Ephraim, to Include New Chapter 404, Entitled, “Tree Removal and Replacement”

Ord. 2024-05 Repealing and Replacing Ordinance 2023-13, to Include New Chapter 307 Entitled “Privately-owned Salt Storage”

Mayor Carney opened the public hearing on these two ordinances. Seeing no public comment, on a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the public hearing was closed. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, Ordinances 2024-04 and 2024-05 were adopted with the following poll vote: Carney-yes; Marrone-yes; Wolk-yes.

Clerk Shannon then read the following ordinance for introduction on first reading:

Ord. 2024-06 Amending the Zoning Code with Regard to the Permitted and Conditional Uses in the Commercial District

On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the introduction of Ordinance 2024-06 was approved with the following poll vote: Carney-yes; Marrone-yes; Wolk-yes. Commissioner Wolk explained that this ordinance will be posted for 30 days and the public hearing will be at the next commission meeting.

RESOLUTIONS FOR APPROVAL BY CONSENT AGENDA

The Clerk read the following Resolutions by title for approval by Consent Agenda:

- 24-56 Resolution Approving Mercantile Licenses for 2024
- 24-57 Resolution Awarding Contracts to Vendors for Vehicle Maintenance Services
- 24-58 Resolution Awarding Contracts to Various Professionals under a Fair and Open Process
- 24-59 Resolution Authorizing Self-Examination of the 2024 Municipal Budget
- 24-60 Resolution Authorizing the 2024 Municipal Budget to be Read by Title at the Time of Public Hearing

On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the resolution consent agenda was approved with the following poll vote: Carney-yes, Marrone-yes, Wolk-yes.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2024 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Mayor Carney announced that the budget was introduced at the April 3 commission meeting and is posted on the borough website and was advertised in the Retrospect Newspaper.

Commissioner Wolk read the budget message that was posted on the borough website. He added that he and Commissioner Marrone approved the budget at the prior meeting but Mayor Carney voted no. So, tonight is the public hearing.

Mayor Carney stated we disagreed on this budget. She would have no problem raising taxes if she felt it was necessary, but she believes that what is being budgeted for 2024 is substantially different with what was actually spent in 2023 and needs further examination. She reviewed the comparisons between what was expended last year and what is being requested this year. Auditor Rob Inverso explained that the date the Mayor was provided contained a mistake in police salaries and wages. But he believes the data he provided is accurate.

Mayor Carney then opened the public hearing on the Budget. Present was Terri Armbruster, who asked about the possible amendment. Mayor Carney responded that when we close the public hearing, there is a possibility of an amendment, but it has to be seconded by one of the other two commissioners. Armbruster said she wants someone to second that.

Mike Rossano asked about the increase in interest revenue budgeted for this year and Commissioner Wolk asked CFO Paul Thomas to explain. Paul explained that interest rates have gone up and we have been moving money into the NJ Cash Management Fund and we realized a

good increase in interest income. Also present was Stan Witkowski who asked about the budget message read by Commissioner Wolk. You said total assessments went up by 1.5 million dollars, then why are taxes being increased? Auditor Rob Inverso stated that he believes that is a mistake and Commissioner Wolk said we will look into that to get the correct information.

The following residents all rose and spoke about the budget and that fact that our taxes are already too high: Jeff Bowen, Tom McNamee, Megan McFarland, Teresa Malik, Joanne D'Alessandro and others. The consensus of all was that the governing body has to take another look at this and try not to raise taxes. People cannot afford to stay in this town. Commissioner Wolk reminded everyone that we not only collect our taxes, but also the school and the county taxes. We rely on the police chief and the fire chief to tell us what they need. He said that Mayor Carney wants to cut the police budget. Mayor Carney responded that she does not want to defund the police. She supports police and fire but wants to make sure the budget makes sense. We have been running with eight patrolman for a long time and she does not believe we need a ninth. Commissioner Marrone said that now that you don't want to pay for the sick time sellback, the officers will take their time which create a hardship. Mayor Carney explained that the law was adopted in 2010 that made paying for sick time sellback was illegal. We, like many other towns, continue to pay it but I do not intend to violate the law. Residents also commented on the mistakes that have already been identified and asked how sure we can be that the budget information is accurate. All of the residents agreed that the commissioners need to work together to make sure numbers are accurate and that everything has been done to keep taxes down. Sharon Nocella, who identified herself as the mayor's sister, said she appreciates how difficult their jobs are but right now, we don't have confidence in this budget and you need to look at it further. Donna Walker added you need to take another look at this and come back with a better budget.

After more discussion about the budget, Mayor Carney suggested that we table the budget for now until we can look at this in more detail and make sure the numbers are accurate. Solicitor Platt pointed out that we first need to close the public portion. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the budget hearing was closed. Mayor Carney said we will have another meeting at some point to review this again, either a special meeting or at the next regular meeting and notice will be posted.

On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, it was agreed to table adoption of the budget with all in favor.

Solicitor Platt then pointed out that we need to extend the temporary budget. On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, Resolution 24-61 to Extend the Temporary Budget, was approved with the following poll vote: Carney-yes; Marrone-yes; Wolk-yes.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Marrone read highlights from the April monthly report from the Construction Office reporting they issued 12 permits for a total of \$1,860.00, eight vacant registrations for a total of \$4000.00 and four CO inspections for a total of \$480.00. For Public Works, 168.22 tons of trash for a cost of \$15,476.34. It is hot in this room because the air conditioner broke down and we are receiving proposals for repairs.

Commissioner Wolk read the Tax Collector's report for April reporting total collections for the month were \$867,624.22 and \$11,728.10 in lien redemptions.

Mayor Carney announced that we received a certificate of achievement from the Camden County Municipal Joint Insurance Fund for reducing the number of lost time accidents by more than 15% and for zero lost time injuries for 2023.

Engineer Greg Fusco reported we submitted the Camden County Open Space application and we received notification from NJDOT that Municipal Aid applications are due July 1.

Mayor Carney read highlights from the April report for the Fire Department reporting they had 41 calls for service and she read highlights of the incidents. They are hosting Coach Bingo this Saturday night at the Brooklawn VFW. The monument at the firehouse is in full swing. She then read highlights from the April report for the Police Department reporting they had 625 calls for service and she read highlights of the calls. They made 109 traffic stops and issued 118 summonses and served 19 warrants. Mayor Carney then reported we will be posting information about the senior program and asking who needs assistance and what kind of programs they would like. She also reported on the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive and asked everyone to put out non-perishable food for collection by the mail carriers. This helps our South Jersey Food Bank.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mayor Carney opened the meeting to the public and asked that residents state their name for the record.

Terry Armbruster thanked the governing body for the measures that have been taken to reduce speeding on Fourth Avenue.

Steve Beach, Construction Official, said we have the best office in the state. He comes in one day and finds that his office is now the mayor's office. Every time he tried to move downstairs, you, the Mayor stops me and you never have time to talk to me. I want to know why the downstairs can't be cleaned like your new office. This happened when I wasn't even there. I got the DCA behind me—"if you want to play, we can play". Mayor Carney responded that he has reinvented history. When we came into office, I asked if we had an office space available. That office was available and it seemed silly to have it used only for one or two offices per week. When I mentioned to you, you were thrilled to move downstairs. The downstairs was filled with bankers boxes from the police department which had to be moved out. Once everything was moved out, there were things remaining that also needed to be moved. Public Works had to do this in between their regular hours. Then we had to make sure the space was cleaned. It is almost ready Steve. Commissioner Marrone added that he will be getting keys. Beach said he is very upset about how you came in and took over the office. You just cleared out my office. Mayor Carney responded that nothing was thrown out—your little bit of stuff was put in bankers boxes and moved downstairs.

Rick Heeb from Winthrop Avenue asked if we know anything about the school budget yet. Commissioner Marrone responded that you have input at the school board meeting. Mayor Carney added that we don't have any input on their budget. If they go over 3%, then it goes to the voters. The resident then asked about possibly getting microphones. Mayor Carney responded we are looking into that.

Mike Burns from Thompsen Avenue asked if there is any way we can ask the state about constructing a wall along 295. They have them in other towns but not ours. We would really appreciate it because of the sound. Mayor Carney said our engineer will look into it.

Jerry Kappatos from Valley Road asked if the cannabis shop is going to be paving the parking lot. Mayor Carney said they are asking for temporary parking at the Budget Inn until their request from NJDOT gets approved. Commissioner Marrone said they ran into issues with the DOT. As soon as they get DOT permission, we will require them to do the paving. Mayor Carney added that we will now have permit parking on Valley Road for the residents and you can get your permit from the police department.

Joe O'Corso from Glover Avenue talked about the junk and trash on the property behind him on Thompson Avenue. Come to my house and see what I have to look at. The police have been there and so have the code people. Commissioner Marrone said we have sent letters and next we will be issuing fines. Jeff Bowen added that the guy who owns the house is letting someone else live there. The guy is a hoarder and stockpiles junk there and we are tired of looking at it. Solicitor Platt added it could be a health issue so we could get the Camden County Board of Health involved too.

Donna Walker from Thompson Avenue said they got a dumpster but they have increased the garbage that comes into the yard. They were getting their concrete wall fixed but rather than remove the concrete debris, he decided to keep it and now there is more trash. Mayor Carney said we will request involvement from the Camden County Health Department.

Tom McNamee from Green Avenue asked about the portion of Gaskill that is a paper road. Because of the new homes, Gaskill is no longer accessible. Who owns that property? Commissioner Marrone said we would look into it.

Ralph Ferret from Lincoln Avenue said the property behind him has a pool that is not used and it is a mosquito pool. The house is on Oak. Commissioner Marrone said we will look into it. Solicitor Platt we will start with local enforcement and then involve the county health department.

Seeing no further public comment, on a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the public hearing was closed.

On a motion by Commissioner Marrone, second by Commissioner Wolk, the meeting was adjourned at 9:11pm.

Approved: Terry Shannon
Terry Shannon, Borough Clerk